

ON THE INTELLIGENCE EXPLOITATION OF  
OPEN SOURCE CHINESE DOCUMENTS

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(U) The normalization of relations between the U.S. and the Peoples' Republic of China has provided new intelligence collection opportunities in open-source Chinese language publications. Several Chinese military and industrial publications are now increasingly available, although most remain untranslated.

(U) China has been a closed society for most of its long history, and thus has some unique cultural and historical characteristics which analysts must take into account. History shows that in China the bearer of bad tidings to the Emporer traditionally was rewarded with death. This means that analysts should not be surprised that Chinese language sources contain no bad news. For example,

Chinese reporting on their operations on the Vietnamese border in 1979 confirms that the tendency to dwell on the positive and avoid the negative is still operable today.

(U) This disposition toward no bad news manifests itself in open source documents in two basic forms, blatant hyperbole and cautious conservatism, and the analyst must supply his own objectivity to the overstatements and understatements which he will often encounter.

(U) The Chinese publication, Knowledge of Ships provides a case in point. It offers a considerable body of information about naval matters, but the quality and reliability of the data are low. The publication is written on the grade

school level, and often it simply reiterates lessons learned in the Second World War and the Arab-Israeli conflicts. Examples from the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts are notably absent. The blatant optimism in evidence when discussing the future is, no doubt, intended to inspire China's future generation of leaders, but there is rarely any evidence to support such optimism.

(U) As stultifying as it might seem, sifting through Knowledge of Ships is nevertheless a worthwhile experience that occasionally uncovers useful information. In one article, "The Role of Guided Missile Speedboat in an Engagement," for example, the author stated that "planners" are considering assigning an antiaircraft mission to one or two of the six boats in a typical OSA or KOMAR squadron.

(U) For technical intelligence of naval interest, Knowledge of Ships is greatly surpassed by the Journal of Shipbuilding in China, a source which seems to have been published for some time on the mainland. It did not become available through U.S. State Department sources until last year. It addresses research topics in marine engineering in considerable detail but, more importantly, it demonstrates that the Chinese are actively exploiting American, British, Soviet, Japanese and German work in this field.

(U) The Journal also reveals that test instruments employed by the Chinese are of German, Japanese

and Chinese manufacture. The Chinese experiments generally pick up where the exploited source left off, carrying the testing one step further or seeking empirical confirmation of a theory propounded by the source. From the technical intelligence perspective, this publication can be valuable in providing new information about the marine engineering topics of interest to China, an appreciation of the foreign sources being exploited by the Chinese, and the results of their experiments in this field. Combined with other intelligence, such open source exploitation offers a reasonably accurate assessment of where China stands in this area of technology.

(U) Other open sources becoming available from China include a publication entitled Contemporary Military Affairs. This publication is targeted for consumption by military analysts instead of general readers. The Pacific and Indian Ocean theaters receive good coverage, although there are some obvious gaps in detail.

(U) In short, the recent release of previously unavailable publica-

tions has provided western analysts with a new opportunity to study Chinese naval developments. Exploitation of these documents, in combination with intelligence gleaned from other sources should prove to be both revealing and informative.